THE MAIN IDEA
current education book summaries

The Anxious Generation
How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness

By Jonathan Haidt (Penguin Press, 2024)

S.O.S. (A Summary of the Summary)

The main ideas of the book:

~ Two recent changes in childhood – overprotection and smartphones – are blocking kids from getting the real-life experiences they need to be mentally healthy.

~ But it's not too late to make a difference! All parts of society will need to act to reverse the decline in youth mental health, and schools can contribute by banning phones during the school day and increasing free play.

Why I chose this book:

In recent months, it seems everyone's been talking about *The Anxious Generation* and that's not surprising. Jonathan Haidt's book offers new research findings to help us answer urgent questions about kids' and teens' declining mental health. Instead of worrying for another year about students' anxiety, depression, and suicide rates, educators now have two suggested actions proposed by Haidt: ban phones for the entirety of the school day and increase kids' free play.

Some schools and districts are acting already. In other districts, conversations are just beginning. But within the next year I predict that the issues Haidt raises are likely to cross every school leader's desk. Many leaders will be asked to implement and explain policy changes made at the district or state level. Others will need to respond to concerns from parents and teachers. Some leaders may decide to take the lead themselves on banning phones and increasing play.

For school leaders who find themselves in any of these roles, I hope that my summary and accompanying discussion guide will equip them to face the conversations and changes to come as we all seek better mental health for our kids.


The Scoop (In this summary you will learn…)

✓ New research findings that suggest smartphones and overprotection are at the root of the youth mental health crisis

✓ Why kids need free play, in-person interaction, and more independence (and what happens when they're deprived)

✓ How smartphones and overprotection have kept kids from the real-world experiences they need

✓ The 2 moves Haidt recommends schools make to address the youth mental health crisis: ban phones and increase play

✓ The Main Idea's discussion questions for talking about these issues with families

  *** Listen to [my podcast](#) about the book and how one superintendent successfully implemented a cellphone ban.

Anyone who has spent a lot of time around kids in recent years has heard (or asked) the question, "What's going on?" Parents, educators, and even kids and teens themselves have the sense that something is missing or that something is wrong.

For the first decade of the 2000s, rates of depression in U.S. teens were fairly steady. But in 2010, the number of teens who reported having at least one major depressive episode in the past year began to rise steeply and steadily. By 2021 the number had increased by roughly 150%. Here is a visual of what this might look like in a classroom:

Teens Suffering from Depression

2010   **2021**
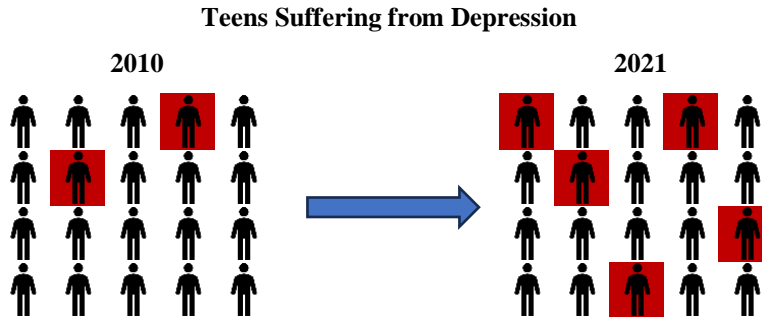
A deeper dive into the data from this same decade shows similarly steep increases in anxiety, suicide, and self-harm. While both boys and girls are affected, the suicide and self-harm rates for girls in particular rose alarmingly. You can see the data, visuals for other data mentioned in this summary, and more on the author's website: jonathanhaidt.com/anxious-generation/supplement/.

These are startling statistics, but many of us aren't surprised because we've witnessed the crisis firsthand. **What is going on?** To help our kids, we need to get to the bottom of it. What could the explanation be? What might have played *some* role in the mental health crisis? To best serve our kids we need to think critically about the most significant drivers of this widespread collapse in well-being.

What *Can't* Account for the Teen Mental Health Crisis

Are kids over-reporting? Maybe they're mistaking normal sadness or worry for a disorder? While this might happen sometimes, measures that *aren't* self-reported such as suicides and emergency room visits for self-harm increased similarly over the same period.

Are kids more willing to acknowledge mental illness these days? They are, and that's actually a good thing. But this doesn't explain increases in suicides and self-harm.

What about Covid and school closures? Covid certainly made things worse, but not until 2020. The increase started in 2010.

Could it be a response to current events? Teens do worry about violence, politics, unemployment, and so on, but …

> • **We know how big, widespread problems normally affect people.** Historically, when people faced collective threats, they showed higher levels of trust and cooperation, lower rates of suicide, and no rise mental illness.

> • **It's happening in many places at exactly the same time.** Teen mental health in the U.K., Australia, Canada, and Scandinavia also plummeted from 2010-2021. The cause is therefore not likely to be the national economy, national politics, or gun violence because these vary from one country to the next.

The Big Experiment

So, what do the people who came of age in the 2010s in nations all over the world have in common? At a critical window in their development, they experienced a **drastic reduction of real-world experiences** compared to previous generations. They spent less much time playing outdoors and way more time online.

In recent decades, we, as a society, conducted an unplanned experiment on the way children grow up when we **(1) gave them new, untested technology** (smartphones, algorithm-driven media content, and more) and **(2) reduced the amount of play** in their days. Only now can we see the results clearly: **our collective experiment was (and continues to be) devastating for mental health.**

We have a lot of work to do to dig ourselves out of this disaster, and schools must play a role. *The Anxious Generation* author, Jonathan Haidt, identifies **two things schools can do**: **(1) ban phones** and **(2) increase play.** The following sections describe what kids need for healthy development and why these two actions are so critical.
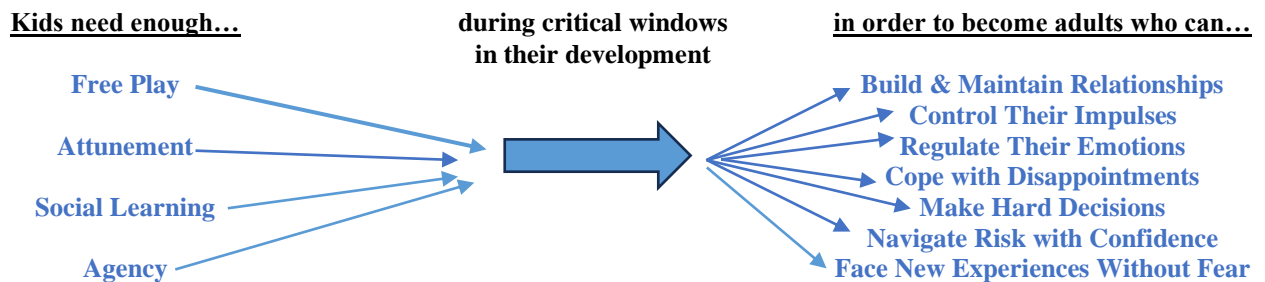
What All Kids Need

To begin to understand these increasing mental health challenges and what might help our kids, we need to start with the basics. What makes a mentally healthy childhood?

The answers are many (food, shelter, friends, medical care…), but this section zooms in on **4 things that kids and teens need but get less of** than their parents and grandparents did: **free play, attunement, social learning,** and **agency**. Each one is explained below.

Free Play	Attunement
Free play is **self-chosen**, **self-directed** and **undertaken for its own sake.** When children play freely, **they learn to suppress their impulses** (like being bossy or behaving recklessly). Children can only learn how *not* to get hurt by experiencing situations where getting hurt is possible (like wrestling with a friend). **They learn how to cooperate and play fairly** in situations where lack of cooperation or fairness will result in playmates deciding to quit. Kids kept inside for safety reasons or handed devices full of engaging content don't play as much as they need to. **They fail to fully develop their self-control or their ability to cooperate. They become anxious about facing any risk.**	Attunement includes **turn-taking**, **synchronized movement,** and **shared emotion**. A baby makes noises or facial expressions back and forth with a caregiver. Older kids taking turns startling each other for fun, participating in clapping games, or inventing dance routines. Attunement practice is **the foundation of emotional self-regulation.** It allows children to **practice paying attention to others' cues** and **belonging to a group.** But smartphones interfere with attunement. Caregivers sometimes look at phones instead of children. Older kids look at phones instead of each other. **Humans who don't practice attunement enough are impaired in their ability to maintain relationships**, **handle unexpected events, or make decisions.**
Social Learning	Agency
Social learning means copying others. Sometimes it looks like conformity (**doing what everyone does**). But it can also be **doing what the popular or successful person does**. It can be negative (like peer pressure) or positive (like learning appropriate behavior in a new setting through observation). Educators use social learning to shape behavior when they say things like "I like how Eli is raising his hand." **Humans respond best to social learning that involves face-to-face interaction among people they know.** When kids get their social learning from screens they learn to imitate "influencers" or post content that gets lots of "likes." The sheer volume of social learning data available can provoke anxiety.	Agency is **choosing to face challenges and master new skills.** Babies try to stand while grasping furniture then try letting go. Older children might climb on chairs to reach cupboards, brave the dark stairs to the basement, or walk to friends' houses alone. Adolescents can learn to drive cars or work at part-time jobs. **The chance to take on challenges when they're ready is part of what humans need for healthy development.** When they're shielded from real-life experiences or when they pursue challenge mainly in video games, kids don't get enough opportunity to exercise the kind of agency that leads to emotional growth and social development. Deprived of agency, they become more prone to anxiety.

Children are driven to seek experiences that provide these four, just as they are driven to eat when hungry. If they don't get enough of what they need, they become frustrated and distressed. If the scarcity lasts too long, their development is impaired. In other words:

Kids need enough…	during critical windows in their development	in order to become adults who can…
Free Play Attunement Social Learning Agency	→	Build & Maintain Relationships Control Their Impulses Regulate Their Emotions Cope with Disappointments Make Hard Decisions Navigate Risk with Confidence Face New Experiences Without Fear

Without plenty of experiences that provide free play, attunement, high-quality social learning, and agency, kids are likely to grow into teens and adults who **struggle to manage their emotions, form bonds with others, and deal with the ups and downs of life.**

The Experience Blockers: Smartphones and Safetyism

So, why are kids today getting *so much less* of what they need for mental health? In recent decades, shifts in technology and culture have introduced **2 experience blockers** — that is, things that interfere significantly with the real-world experiences kids need. These experience blockers have led to the steep rises we're seeing in mental illness.

The 2 BIG EXPERIENCE BLOCKERS: **SMARTPHONES** and **SAFETYISM.**

Here, "smartphone" is shorthand for many developments in technology that have converged in recent years. "Safetyism" is shorthand for adults' perception that the world is unsafe, which leads them to limit children's freedom to play and encounter real-life challenges. We'll explore both of these experience blockers in this section.

Smartphones as Experience Blockers

In the early 2000s most people were excited and optimistic about the internet and new technology. Technology was fun, useful, and held seemingly limitless possibilities. Smartphones and iPads kept children happily engaged, often with educational content, but, behind the scenes, tech companies were using psychology to maximize engagement and time spent on apps and devices.

Time spent swiping or tapping a screen (whether it's educational or not) is time NOT spent playing, exploring, or interacting with others. Kids on devices miss out on experiences that are critical for their development.

From 2010-2015 childhood and adolescence rapidly transformed. Virtual interactions and digital entertainment *displaced* **in-person interactions,** play, and physical experiences on an unimaginably large scale. Kids whose parents and grandparents had play-based childhoods, got phone-based childhoods instead.

Technological Developments 2007 – 2012

- spread of high-speed internet
- iPhones & iPads
- push notifications
- "selfie" cameras
- "like" and "retweet" buttons
- autoplay feature
- algorithms that customize content

By 2015, 70% of American teens were carrying their own screen everywhere they went. Today, teens spend about 50 hours a week on screen-based leisure activities and 45% report that they use the internet "almost constantly." Of course, kids have watched TV for decades, but in recent years they've added 2-3 hours of screen-based leisure. That time comes at a cost (also known as opportunity cost) and the new media interferes with development to a greater degree than TV. Haidt names four main ways phones harm kids.

The Four Foundational Harms of the Phone-Based Childhood

(1) Sleep Deprivation: Teens need at least 8 hours of sleep, but the percent of teens getting less than 7 hours of sleep on average increased steeply starting around 2013 (around when smartphone ownership became common). Heavy use of screen-based media is associated with less sleep, taking longer to get to sleep, and waking up more in the midst of sleep. Sleep deprivation and sleep disturbance leads to greater rates of depression as well as behavioral problems.

(2) Social Deprivation: For healthy development, kids and teens need lots of social interaction with their peers. Social media and online gaming may feel like they are filling that need, but they're poor substitutes. Like filling up on candy instead of eating dinner, digital socializing tricks kids into thinking their social needs are being met, when they're really getting the lowest quality social "nutrients" available. Starting around 2013, the percent of teens who described themselves as "lonely" rose dramatically.

(3) Addiction: Some number of children and adults are susceptible to developing screen-based behavioral addictions. Video games, social media, shopping sites, and more all tap into powerful reward systems that leave human brains wanting more, more, more! Children are especially vulnerable to manipulation and addiction because their brains are still developing. That's why we don't let them buy cigarettes or alcohol, and why we don't let those companies market to kids.

(4) Attention Fragmentation: Smartphones stand by to answer any question that pops up (What's that actor's name again?) or fill any spare moment with bite-sized entertainment (scrolling Instagram in the checkout line). Add to that about 11 push notifications per hour and the desire to check for "likes" and replies, and phones become very hard to resist. Teens and tweens are even more vulnerable than adults because their brains aren't yet mature. Phones impair kids' cognitive capacities and executive skills.

Even worse, **smartphones harm everyone, even those who don't use them.** The problems they cause cannot be resolved simply by abstaining or being the only kid who doesn't own a phone. If most other kids have phones, the one without will have a very lonely lunch period, no one to talk to between classes, and nowhere to get the social experiences they need. Small children and babies, too, experience this deprivation when their caregivers' attention is focused on digital devices.

<h1 style="text-align:center">Safetyism: The Other Experience Blocker</h1>

Parents and grandparents of today's teens remember childhoods of almost unimaginable freedom. After school and in the summers, they played outside with neighborhood kids. Little of their time and few of their activities were organized or even supervised by adults. From early elementary school on they were allowed to walk or bike alone to school, parks, or friends' homes. As teens, they drove cars, worked part-time jobs, and hung out with their friends in person.

But starting in the 1980s childhood began to shift gradually away from freedom and toward "safetyism" (where safety is prioritized over autonomy or almost anything else). By the early 2000s it was rare for a child of any age to be outside without an adult. Non-school hours were spent more on adult-directed activities in structured environments and less on self-directed activities with friends.

<h2 style="text-align:center">How Adults Interfere with Play</h2>

Adults unintentionally but automatically make play less free (and therefore less beneficial) because they can't resist protecting and directing. If a parent steps in to say, "We don't throw mud," a child doesn't learn *from experience* that a playmate with mud in their hair might stomp away. If a referee makes every foul call, the players won't learn *from experience* how to handle rule violations. Adults think they are teaching kids how to play nicely, but **experience, not information, leads to emotional development.**

When a school or other authority restricts play, kids get fewer benefits. Rules like "one finger tagging only" mean that **kids aren't learning to restrain their own behavior** so they don't tag someone too hard. Rules are more appropriately applied to only the most serious risks, not to games that might result in minor injuries. Kids need to make low-stakes decisions about things like tag now so that they have the skills and confidence to make higher-stakes decisions in the future.

<h2 style="text-align:center">Discover Mode vs. Defend Mode</h2>

Kids in "discover mode" experience agency by adding new experiences they're ready for (for example, moving from skateboarding on a flat surface, to a slope, to a stair railing). People who live mostly in discover mode are happier, more social, and more open to new experiences. But since the early 2000s, children have spent less and less time in discover mode.
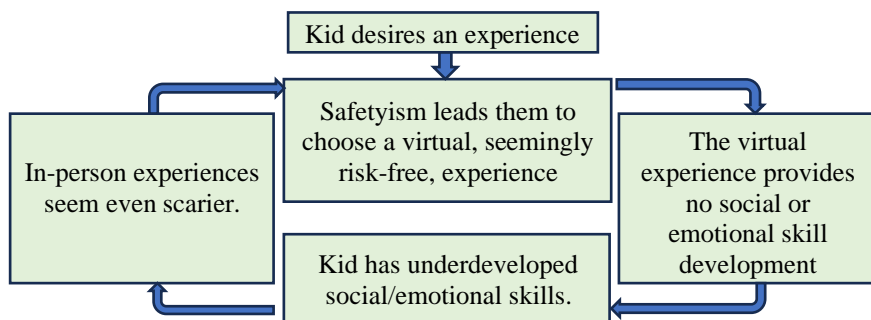
The opposite of discover mode is "defend mode." It's a natural response to a direct threat. A skinned knee might send a young child running back to their caregiver for comfort, but after a hug and a Band-Aid, the child returns to discover mode again.

But when caregivers discourage kids from "getting back out there" or don't let them face age-appropriate challenges in the first place, kids get **stuck in defend mode.** Learning and growth are impeded because kids come to believe they don't have what it takes to handle risk.

<h2 style="text-align:center">The Vicious Cycle of Experience Blockers</h2>

Human beings seek out experiences that will fulfill their innate drives for agency (challenge, risk-taking, and mastery), social learning, and attunement. In the real world, challenge can lead to injury, and hanging out with friends after school might mean being unsupervised. Safetyism (enforced by or learned from adults) leads kids to avoid these real-world challenges and choose supposedly "safe" online alternatives like video games and social media. But while they appear safe, their risks are simply different ones.

Online video games can create the illusion of risk-taking without causing injury, but they also fail to provide social or emotional skill development. In addition to the physical risks, there are enormous benefits to be found in shoulder-to-shoulder adventures like building a tree fort or camping where people rely on one another to overcome challenges. Participants bond and grow together.

Kid desires an experience → Safetyism leads them to choose a virtual, seemingly risk-free, experience → The virtual experience provides no social or emotional skill development → Kid has underdeveloped social/emotional skills. → In-person experiences seem even scarier. →

Tweens who are not allowed to walk to friends' houses may try to meet their needs for attunement and social learning on social media. There, they find interactions stripped of eye contact and facial expressions. "Likes" (the online key to social learning) are quantified publicly (hello, anxiety!) and images of others' bodies and lives are so filtered they're depression inducing. The feed is controlled by unseen algorithms that prioritize reaction-provoking content to keep users hooked.

Young people who've missed bonding by facing challenges alongside friends are likely to be lonely. The same goes for kids who've watched hundreds of dance routines on TikTok but never tried one in a friend's backyard. Missed experiences lead to missing social skills and to lack of confidence. These are likely to drive kids further into the virtual world and away from still more significant social experiences and the development those experiences could have provided. The four foundational harms (sleep deprivation, social deprivation, addiction, and attention fragmentation) await them in the virtual world, too.

What Schools Can Do

So now you know the bad news. It can feel like a lot to take in, and the problem is undeniably overwhelming.

But here's the good news: **schools are uniquely positioned to help** address the problem of experience blockers. Kids and teens spend large parts of the day in school, and schools have the authority to make and enforce rules there. Also, most teachers are eager for effective solutions because they deal with the harmful impact of experience blockers every day.

Haidt recommends schools: **(1) ban phones** and **(2) increase play.** This section explores *how* to make these changes.

Ban Phones

Across the country schools are "trying everything" to address the ongoing student mental health crisis. They've adopted new social-emotional learning programs and are providing instruction in skills like empathy and decision-making. But most have not tried banning phones entirely. Mountain Middle School in Colorado, on the other hand, implemented a total phone ban all the way back in 2012 and saw transformative results. The principal observed drastic improvement in the social-emotional realm and in academics.

Most schools *say* they ban phones, but **banning phones during class time *only* is not effective.** Some students will hide their phone use. Teachers' focus will be drawn away from instruction and onto enforcing phone rules. Even students who comply with the class-time ban will be distracted by thoughts of their phones, and they'll reach for them the moment they're allowed. During breaks and passing periods, phone use will block students from getting the peer interactions they need.

Schools need to act to get kids off experience-blocking smartphones for the entirety of the school day.

Here's what an effective phone ban looks like: **the school provides a dedicated phone locker or lockable phone pouches** for all student phones and requires phones be locked inside as soon as students arrive for the day. The pouches or dedicated lockers are only unlocked, and phones made available again, at the end of the school day when the students leave the building.

Okay, but what about all the ways that technology has benefitted education?
There are many positive uses for technology that support learning. But a student **using a computer for a clear purpose is very different from them carrying around a phone** full of apps *designed* to capture and keep their attention. Haidt is not suggesting schools need to be internet free, or technology free, just smartphone free.

How can schools respond to parent concerns about reaching children in the event of a school shooting or other emergency?
During an active shooter or similar event, a parent texting their child will only make the child less safe. Students' attention should be on instructions from school staff and law enforcement. If needed, schools can ask safety experts to help communicate this to families.

Increase Play

Safetyism is a less concrete experience blocker than smartphones. You can't lock a cultural attitude away in a pouch, and of course student safety *is* an important consideration for schools. But schools can take **four concrete actions:**

(1) Give kids more recess with less adult intervention. More play time equals more social development. Supervising adults should think of themselves like lifeguards—there in case of emergency, but not there to organize activities or resolve minor conflicts.

(2) Open the playground before school. Even an extra thirty minutes outdoors (or in the gym in the case of bad weather) can increase face-to-face time to play with peers and make a big difference.

(3) Offer a "Play Club" after school. In Play Club, kids play together without adult direction and without digital devices. The only rules are (1) Don't hurt anyone on purpose, and (2) Don't leave without telling the adult in charge. Adults are there in case of emergency, not as coaches or activity coordinators.

Make it even better by providing "loose parts" like hula hoops, balls, and cardboard boxes to inspire creative play. A South Carolina teacher tried Play Club along with the first two changes above and unlocked such huge benefits that soon the whole school got on board. Office referrals for behavior decreased from 225 in a year to 45!

(4) Try something new for homework. Assign kids a recurring project in which they must, in consultation with their parents, do something they've never done before such as walk the dog on their own or cook a meal for the family. Schools typically include many families from the same community, so the homework assignments help parents feel okay about allowing new freedoms because it's required, and the neighbors are doing it too. You can find a guide for implementing these assignments as well as one for offering Play Club at letgrow.org.

The youth mental health crisis is serious and ongoing, but it's no longer a mystery. We now have the data to understand how the experience-blocking effects of new technologies plus the cultural attitude of safetyism have combined to impair kids' development and damage their mental health.

While families, tech companies, and governments all have roles to play in rescuing our kids, schools are uniquely positioned to make a difference because they govern how kids and teens spend large parts of their days. Schools can also communicate with many families in a given community and empower whole neighborhoods of parents who want to make the conditions of childhood better.

Schools should act now to ban phones for the entirety of the school day, not just during class time, and schools should increase play through Play Clubs, extended recess time, and opening playgrounds before school.

Consider using The Main Idea's accompanying discussion guide to get productive conversations going on these difficult topics among the families at your school.

THE MAIN IDEA's Guide for Discussing *The Anxious Generation* with Families

PURPOSE

The goal is to invite parents, caregivers, and interested educators to:

    (1) learn the research in the book about youth mental health, (2) discuss concerns, and
    (3) share ideas for discussing these concerns and supporting youth well-being.

Since mental health is a sensitive topic, consider asking a school counselor to co-host the event. NOTE, this is *NOT* a session to gather stakeholder feedback before banning cellphones, nor is it a forum to hear from upset families due to a recent cellphone ban.

WHERE, WHEN, & HOW

An in-person gathering would be best for facilitating the connection and conversation between parents. If you feel you *must* host the meeting virtually, be prepared to sort all participants into breakout groups for in-depth interactions.

PREPARE

Read the summary (or Haidt's whole book) and review the discussion questions below. Get up to speed on **what, if anything, has been done so far in your district** to address the concerns the book raises. Anticipate parents' questions and plan answers. Also, make double-sided copies of pages 2 and 3 of the book summary to use as a HANDOUT for participants.

HOST THE DISCUSSION

I. WELCOME & PURPOSE

A. Welcome everyone. Introduce facilitator(s).

B. Show the book (or image of the cover), *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt.

C. Explain the purpose: Share the 3 goals in the **PURPOSE** section above.

D. Ice-breaker question in small groups: *What did you usually do after school when you were a kid (of the age your child is now)?*

II. WHAT ALL KIDS NEED

A. Share information:
Distribute the HANDOUT and give 5 min. for all to read "What All Kids Need" (free play, attunement, social learning, & agency).

B. Have participants discuss:
    • Were you meeting any of these four needs (free play, attunement, social learning, agency) by doing whatever you usually did after school as a child? Which ones?
    • What does *your child* usually do after school, and do you think it meets their needs?

C. Share information:
Give 2 min. to read the bottom section on the same page of the HANDOUT, beginning with "Kids need enough…"

D. Have participants discuss:
    • Does the information in the chart match with your life experiences or observations?

III. YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

A. Share with participants:
Rates of depression in U.S. teens were steady in the early 2000s. But in 2010, the number of teens who reported having at least one major depressive episode in the past year began to rise steeply. By 2021 the number had increased by roughly 150%. In class of 20, this could look like an increase from 2 students to 5. In the same decade there were similarly steep increases in anxiety, suicide, and self-harm, too. You can see this data and more on the author's website: jonathanhaidt.com/anxious-generation/supplement/.

While there are likely many factors contributing to the youth mental health crisis, researchers are now beginning to conclude that the main driving factor is a **drastic reduction of real-world experiences** compared to previous generations. Today's kids and teens…
    • have gotten less in-person interaction with peers
    • spent less time playing freely
    • had fewer opportunities for agency and autonomy in the real world (like walking somewhere without an adult)

B. Have participants discuss:
    • Have you seen evidence of the decline in youth mental health in your family or community?
    • Do you agree that less in-person interaction with peers, less free play, and less agency/autonomy are leading to increased depression and anxiety?

IV. SMARTPHONES

A. Share information:
• Give 5 min. for everyone to read "The 4 Foundational Harms of the Phone-Based Childhood" (on the back of the HANDOUT).

B. Have participants discuss:
      • Do you see evidence of any of the four harms affecting your children?
      • What can families do to address these harms?

C. Share with participants:
      • Introduce the author's **2 things families can do:**
            (1) **no smartphones before high school**
            (2) **no social media before age 16**

            • Acknowledge the difficulty of addressing the problem alone. If most of their peers have phones, a kid without a phone will still suffer the social deprivation phones cause. Families must discuss the issues and work together.

            • At elementary or middle schools, you could mention the website waituntil8th.org. Here, you can find tools for organizing families in a community to pledge together not to give their children smartphones until 8th grade.

      • Share the author's **suggestions for schools:**
            • **provide lockable pouches or lockers for students to place their phones in for the entirety of the school day** and share about anything being done at your school to minimize the use of phones.
            Note: If you anticipate anger from parents over an announced or pending phone ban, be prepared to redirect them to upcoming stakeholder meetings or other appropriate forums for communicating with decision makers.

            You can also share:
            • Kids are safer during emergencies like school shootings when they aren't distracted by phones. Maybe share this short 3-minute video of Haidt explaining that kids are safer in an emergency if they *don't* have phones.
            • Locking up phones all day helps kids focus on learning during class AND interacting with peers between classes.

** This would be an appropriate time to **pause for questions** or for small groups to share their ideas with the large group.**

V. SAFETYISM

A. Share with participants:
"Safetyism" is the other experience blocker that Haidt says is getting in the way of kids' healthy development. "Safetyism" is shorthand for adults' perception that the world is unsafe, which leads them to limit children's freedom to play and encounter real-life challenges. Today, it is rare for a child of any age to be outside without an adult and non-school hours began are spent more on adult-directed activities in structured environments and less on self-directed activities with friends than in past decades.

B. Have participants discuss:
      • Can you think of any ways you benefitted from independence or being exposed to risk as a child (for example, by learning ways to be careful or by developing self-confidence)?
      • Do you think safetyism is limiting your own children's opportunities to grow and develop and become autonomous?
      • What can families do to address the ways safetyism reduces kids' real-world opportunities?

C. Share with participants:
      • Introduce the author's 2 things families can do:
            (1) **give kids far more unsupervised free play**
            (2) **allow kids ever-growing independence and responsibility**

            • Acknowledge that this is also a difficult problem to address alone because safetyism is a shared cultural attitude and because for kids to get the most benefit from unsupervised free play they need other kids to play with.

      • Share the author's suggestions for schools:
            • **provide longer recess with less adult interference and play options before and after school** and share about anything being done at your school. You can also tell participants about the website letgrow.org where they can get more ideas for providing free play and increasing independence for kids.

** This would be an appropriate time to **pause for questions** or for small groups to share their ideas with the large group.**

VI. CONCLUSION

Close by acknowledging the complexity of the issues raised and the need for families, schools, and communities to work together and listen to each other. Provide some means for participants to follow up with one another if they are interested in further discussion.